

MEDIA & MUSLIM SOCIETY

MOHD. YUSOF HUSSAIN



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Media & Muslim Society

Editor

Mohd. Yusof Hussain



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Chapter Seven

Press Practices in Two Independent Muslim Societies: The Case of Malaysia and Indonesia

Che Mahzan Ahmad

Southeast Asia is home to the world's largest community of ethnically-related Muslims, sharing in the various forms of Malay, a common language. Yet only recently has it been recognized as one of the great geographical zones of Islam in its own right, rather than as a region peripheral to the so called heartlands of the Muslim world.

(A.H.Johns, 2001)

Introduction

Malaysia and Indonesia are two modern polities that form the integral part of the Malay world of Southeast Asia. In those two modern states, Muslims are the majority. After gaining independence (*merdeka*) from the western colonisation, both states were busy with works to build a new nation. Often the building processes are synonymous with activities on translating hopes, dreams, imagination and aspirations as perceived prior to *merdeka* times. All resources, including the press, were expected to be involved in this mammoth task of making those expectations come true. The press as known is a place where meanings are frequently made and constructed, and is viewed as having a certain power over others within the meaning-making interaction process. Here, power is being defined in the widest sense as the capacity to get one's own way in interacting with other human beings. The elites who are entrusted to run the government in one way or another also have similar privileges, specifically in the context of meaning-making due to their

status in society. To some leaders if the press is not on a similar plane with them, a dynamic disorder of struggle and competition over meaning and meaning-making processes would create chaos. In this light, the press would become a factor that undermines the development of the nation. Thus, to these leaders the action of control over meaning is justifiable and should take place. The idea of control in this regard could be a 'submission' or about 'restriction' in some way (Louw, 2001: 1-36).

Realising the dynamics of the press, ruling political masters believed that the press must be 'positively guided' in the name of partnering for development. As such, advancing of 'positive news' to provide momentum for development, stability and progress is emphasized (Romano, 2003: 40). In this functionalist perspective, the press is regarded as the partner of the state (Mustapha Anuar, 2003: 37). Partnering, an ambiguous term though, is meant to support the government's 'right' actions, not to challenge it (Hacten, 1987: 31). However, what is 'right' is often being determined, interpreted and elaborated by the government. Indeed, the term "partnering" is applied in this chapter in light of the above meaning. Implicitly saying, partnering in this perspective is about conformation to state initiatives, while contestation to the wisdom of what is considered right by the state is not celebrated. In this chapter, the complexities and the intricacies of press partnering with the state in Malaysia and Indonesia are addressed with emphasise given to Malay press. As both Malaysia and Indonesia are more or less being shaped and configured largely by prime ministers and presidents, and in due course directed the way for presses to follow, discussions will be narrated along the historical line of leaders' 'services' to their country.

Part 1: Sukarno and Tunku Years (1949-1969)

Indonesia: Not Right, but the 'Guided' Left

Indonesia proclaimed its independent from the Dutch in 1945. The action was 'illegal' in the eyes of the Dutch, and it culminated into four years of revolutionary war (*perang revolusi*). When the Dutch officially recognised the demise of the Dutch East Indies in 1949, Indonesia was in a state of uncertainty in various aspects. The new

About the Contributors

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MEDIA & MUSLIM SOCIETY

The book contains twelve essays on topics related to the subject "Media and Muslim Society." It is compiled as a textbook for students taking the course of the same title at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Thus, the topics selected are those covered in the course. The topics include media at various stages in the development of a Muslim society, the role of communication in a Muslim society, media control, media effects on Muslim society and the roles of *ulamas* in influencing the media. A special topic on Muslim society is also included at the beginning of the book. The contributors of these essays are experts in their field. They have also helped develop and taught the course. In this first edition, most of the examples and discussions are based on two Muslim societies, i.e., Peninsular Malaysia and Indonesia. This is understandable because most of the writers in this first edition are from the Malay world. We hope to include examples from other Muslim societies in the next edition when we get contribution from writers from other parts of the Muslim world. Finally we welcome criticisms and suggestions to improve this book from our readers. We shall certainly consider these criticisms and suggestions in the next edition.



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